



# THE VALIANT

VETERANS AFFAIRS LOGISTICAL INFORMATION AND NEWS TODAY



DECEMBER 2004

VA REGIONAL OFFICE

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

VOL. I NO. X



## *HAPPY HOLIDAYS!*

*I would like to take this time to wish all employees and their families a safe and wonderful holiday season. During calendar year 2004, the Detroit RO made tremendous strides in improving our performance.*

*This was due to everyone's efforts.*

*As this year ends and 2005 begins, we have the same challenges to continue to improve our performance and to make this RO a great place to work. My commitment to you is to continue to keep you informed of those things that impact you and the performance of this station.*

*I have truly enjoyed working with you all. I know with your continued commitment we will excel in 2005. If there is anything I can do to help you better understand what we are doing, please don't hesitate to ask.*

*Here's my wish for a happy and safe holiday for you and your family.*



*Keith J. Thompson  
Director  
Detroit RO*



# THE VA VINE

*"The VA Vine" is for you to share news of special events or celebrations that involve you or a family member! Announce births, weddings, graduations, awards, and any other happening you'd like to brag about! Contact a newsletter member and let's hear your news!*

**VA Announces:** Anthony J. Principi resigned in a letter to President Bush, stating, "I have unbounded gratitude for the confidence you displayed in entrusting me with stewardship of your commitment to the men and women who now wear, or once wore, the uniforms of America's armed forces." President Bush called Principi a "tireless advocate for 25 million veterans." Jim Nicholson, U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican, has been nominated to succeed Mr. Principi as Secretary of Veterans Affairs.



## Holiday Party Time!

Get your tickets now for the Annual VA Detroit Holiday Party! It's always a great time, so plan to attend on Friday, December 17th

The Holiday Party is sponsored by AFGE Local 138 and endorsed by the VA Detroit Regional Office. It will be held at the Athena Banquet Center, 25650 Gratiot Ave., Roseville. Ticket price has been reduced to only \$15 per person for a full buffet dinner, open bar, DJ and dancing. The dinner menu is as follows:

Pan Fried Chicken, Baked Virginia Ham  
Sliced Sirloin of Beef (au jus)  
Baked Redskin Potatoes  
California Blend Vegetables  
Mostaccoli with meat  
Dessert: Sherbet and Cake

The Party will go from 6:00 p.m. until Midnight and dinner will be served promptly at 7:00 p.m.

## CFC Fundraiser Tally

The CFC total for 2004 is **\$33,872.05!** A very respectable sum to give to those in need! Although we did not meet goal or match last year's total, we contributed more than was given in 2001 and 2002 and with less employees giving. This year 118 employees gave, last year 149, in 2002 142, and in 2001 163. FYI - the Lunch and Laugh sessions brought in \$120, the Piston tickets \$256, and the Red Wings skating event \$60.00.



THANK YOU!!!

To all the contributors, key workers, fundraiser donators, helpers, idea suggestors, performers, and anyone I may be missing. It was a pleasure working with all of you and thank you whoever was responsible, for this blessed opportunity!

Latessa

## Interviewing 101

It seems like everyone should know common sense rules for interviewing, but according to the sad tales told by a lot of hiring professionals, common sense must be in pretty short supply these days. Here are tips to keep in mind:

- Take a shower before you interview.
- Wear clean clothes; dress appropriately.
- Go light on the perfume or cologne.
- Don't avoid eye contact, slouch or fidget.
- Don't speak too softly or too loudly.
- Don't give one-word answers.
- Don't be too self-critical, but be honest.
- Don't be rude to the boss's staff.
- Don't trash your last employer.
- Thank the interviewer before you leave.
- Don't complain, or show laziness.

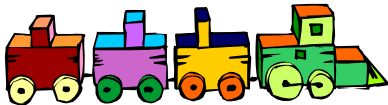
From *First Draft*, January issue, adapted from ABC.com

This month's column is going to be a cornucopia of seasonal musings. Enjoy!

### A Lesson In Humanity

Years ago a 10 year old boy approached the counter of a soda shop and climbed onto a stool. "What does an Ice Cream Sundae cost?" he asked the waitress. "Fifty cents," she answered. The boy reached deep in his pockets and pulled out an assortment of change, counting it carefully as the waitress grew impatient. She had "bigger" customers to wait on. "Well, how much would just plain ice cream be?" the boy asked. The waitress responded with noticeable irritation in her voice. "Thirty-five cents." Again, the boy slowly counted his money. "May I have some plain ice cream in a dish then, please?" He gave the waitress the correct amount and she brought him the ice cream. Later, the waitress returned to clear the boy's dish and as she picked it up, she felt a lump in her throat. There on the counter the boy had left two nickels and five pennies. She realized that he had had enough money for the sundae, but sacrificed it so that he could leave her a tip.

The Moral: *Before passing judgment, first treat others with courtesy, dignity, and respect.* (I found this in my dad's church bulletin--no matter how old a story may be, sometimes the lesson remains eternal.)



### Polar Express VA Style

Actually, it's the North Pole Express here in Michigan. In Owosso to be exact. You can jump on the web site to read more about it. (Just type in North Pole Express Owosso Michigan.) The cooolllll thing is - our own Ed Gromek, RVSR, fulfilled his childhood dream of being the conductor of a real steam locomotive. Check out the picture page... That's really him in the driver's seat of ole' number 1225! He had to apply, pass a physical, and obtain a license from the Federal Railroad Administration. In order to 'man' this 400 ton locomotive, you must have good vision and hearing, and have the physical strength to operate it as it is not power assisted. Ed said ole' #1225 takes 200 pounds of coal to travel one mile! Ed had the 'once in a lifetime' pleasure of driving this 'piece of history' for an hour this past July. Wow Ed, way cool, thanks for sharing!

(My uncle was also a conductor railroad or orchestra you ask? No, he was struck by lightning)

### Christmas Fun Facts



\*For every real Christmas tree harvested, 2 to 3 seedlings are planted in its place.

\*Before settling on the name of Tiny Tim for his character in "A Christmas Carol", three other names were considered by Charles Dickens. They were Small Sam, Puny Pete, and Little Larry. (You have *got* to be kidding!)

\*The Christmas season begins at sundown December 24<sup>th</sup> and lasts through sundown January 5<sup>th</sup>. For that reason, this season is also known as the Twelve Days of Christmas. (I had no idea--did you?)

\*Mistletoe was once revered by the early Britons. It was sooo sacred that it had to be cut with a golden sickle. (Geez... )

\*Alabama was the first state to recognize Christmas as an official holiday. This tradition began in 1836.

\*In 1939 a guy named Robert May created Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer as a Christmas promotion for Montgomery Ward's in Chicago. (See what you can start with a creative idea...)

\*Candy canes made their debut in 1670 when they were given out by a choir master to quiet noisy children. (I think it takes an I-pod today...)

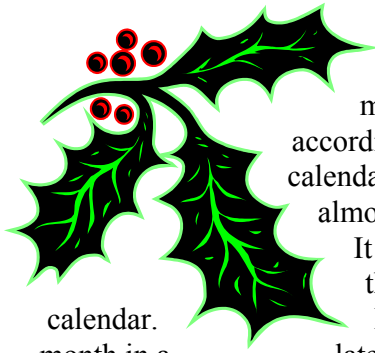
\*Christmas caroling began as an old English custom called Wassailing - toasting neighbors to a long and healthy life. (Ahem, I can see I have a bit more spiritual development to undergo...)

\*Happy Holidays and blessings, peace, health, and happiness to you all! Enjoy the *presence* of your loved ones and don't lose focus on the reason for the season!

See you next month, and as always, be well!

Latessa

## DECEMBER FUN FACTS



calendar. month in a  
Until 46 B.C., December only had 29 days. But the Roman statesman Julius Caesar added two days to December, which made it 31 days.

**December** is the twelfth and last month of the year according to the Gregorian calendar. This is used in almost all the world today. It was the tenth month in the early Roman calendar. It became the twelfth later Roman calendar.

In the northern half of the world, Winter begins in December. Winter does not begin until December 21 or 22, and most of December is usually warmer than other winter months. The latter part of December has long been a holiday season. Christians celebrate Christmas Day, as the birthday of Jesus Christ.

In the Northern Hemisphere, most birds have gone to warmer climates. But many animals are active. Mink, beavers, and foxes grow beautiful coats of fur. Nature finishes preparing for the long winter ahead. Many people make feeding places for birds and squirrels.

Turquoise and zircon are the birthstones for December. Holly, narcissus, and poinsettias are the flowers for the month of December.



featured here last month and Capricorn the Goat, Dec 22 – Jan 20 featured below:

Capricorn is one of the most stable and serious of the zodiac types. These independent, rocklike characters have many sterling qualities. They are, strong willed, confident and calm.

These hard-working, unemotional, practical, responsible and cautious persons, are capable of persisting as long as necessary to accomplish a goal they have set for themselves. They are reliable workers in almost any profession they undertake. They are the major finishers of most projects started by others; quickly become the backbone of any company they work for, and when practical ability and ambitious drive are required to make a project succeed, Capricornians are the people to hire. They make resourceful, determined managers; setting high standards for themselves and others. They respect discipline, plan carefully, are economical without meanness, and are able to achieve results with minimum effort and expense. Their organizing ability enables them to work on several projects at once.

They are strongly attracted to music and jobs that have to do with math or money. They excel as bureaucrats, especially where projects demanding long-term planning and hard work are concerned. Their skill in debate and dialect make them good politicians. They are excellent educators, especially as principals where they have the authority to manage and organize without too much intimacy with the staff members. Certain Capricornians with wit, flippancy or musical ability may turn to entertainment as a career.

Source: Astrology-online.com



### **DECEMBER** **Newsletter Contributors**

Judy Bilicki  
Michele S. Blunk  
Hugh Hill  
Latessa  
Penny Passenger  
Julie Tucker  
Sue Drag

## A SOLDIER'S CHRISTMAS



'Twas the night before Christmas, He lived all alone;  
In a one bedroom house made of plaster and stone.  
I had come down the chimney with presents to give,  
And to see just who in this home did live.

I looked all about, a strange sight did I see,  
No tinsel, no presents, not even a tree.  
No stocking by the mantle, just boots filled with sand,  
On the wall hung pictures of far distant lands.

With medals and badges, awards of all kinds,  
A sober thought came through my mind.  
For this house was different, it was dark and dreary,  
I found the home of a soldier, once I could see clearly.

The soldier lay sleeping, silent, alone,  
Curled up on the floor in this one bedroom home.  
The face was so gentle, the room in such disorder,  
Not how I pictured a United States soldier.

Was this the hero of whom I'd just read?  
Curled up on a poncho, the floor for a bed?  
I realized the families that I saw this night,  
Owed their lives to these soldiers who were willing to fight.

Soon round the world, the children would play,  
And grown-ups would celebrate a bright Christmas Day.  
They all enjoyed freedom each month of the year,  
Because of the soldiers, like the one lying here.

I couldn't help wonder how many lay alone,  
On a cold Christmas Eve in a land far from home.  
The very thought brought a tear to my eye,  
I dropped to my knees and started to cry.

The soldier awakened and I heard a rough voice,  
"Santa, Don't cry, this life is my choice,  
I fight for freedom, I don't ask for more,  
My life is my God, my Country, my Corps."

The soldier rolled over and drifted to sleep,  
I couldn't control it, I continued to weep.  
I kept watch for hours, so silent and still  
And we both shivered from the cold night's chill.

I didn't want to leave on that cold, dark night,  
This Guardian of Honor so willing to fight.  
Then the soldier rolled over, with a voice soft and pure,  
Whispered, "Carry on Santa, It's Christmas Day, All is Secure."

One look at my watch, and I knew he was right,  
Merry Christmas my friend, and to all a good night!





## DECEMBER NEWS



### Stay healthy during cold and flu season!!

Most adults suffer two to four colds each year while children come down with about

six to eight. Though colds and flus are usually not serious, they can cause much misery and suffering. As a result, the person that is sick is not the only one affected by their annoying condition. In addition, countless days of work and school are lost each year due to severe colds and flus alone!

**What's the number one way to avoid catching the flu?** Wash your hands (with soap). Simple hand washing with soap and water has been long known to help inhibit the spread of the influenza virus. Wash your hands after visiting a public place, such as work, the gym, or the grocery store, and each time before you eat. Remind your child to take the following precautions to avoid spreading germs and contracting illnesses:

- Wash hands frequently, especially before or after touching people or toys.
- Avoid rubbing the eyes, nose and mouth.
- Cover the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Quickly discard used tissues.

You've been washing your own hands for quite a while...all it takes is a little soap and water, right? Actually, there is a bit more to it. You need to know that the single most important thing you can do to keep from getting sick and to stop the spread of disease-causing germs is to wash your hands **often**. By frequently washing your hands, you wash away germs that you may have picked up from other people or from contaminated surfaces. One of the most common ways people catch colds is by rubbing their nose or their eyes after their hands have been contaminated with the cold virus.

More frequent hand washing may be able to reduce the spread of the cold virus. You cannot see germs with the naked eye, so wash your hands often. Especially important times include:

- Before, during, and after you prepare food
- Before you eat
- After you use the bathroom
- After you change a diaper
- After handling animals or animal waste
- When your hands are dirty
- More frequently when someone in your home is sick

**Here's How:** To properly wash your hands, follow these simple steps:

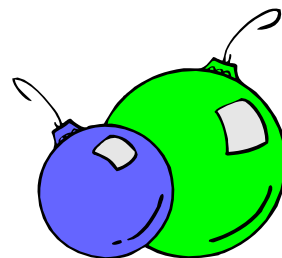
- First wet your hands with warm water and apply liquid or lather up with a clean bar of soap.
- Next rub your hands together vigorously and scrub all surfaces. Also clean under your fingernails to help control germs and keep them trimmed and short.
- Continue for at least 15 seconds or about the length of a little tune (for example: the "Happy Birthday" song). It is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs.
- Rinse your hands well and then dry your hands.

Note: When soap is not readily available, alcohol-based hand rubs offer a quick and easy alternative. No water is needed and studies show they're fairly effective. But washing with soap is still the best.

### **SOURCE:**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov/>

By Julie Tucker



## DECEMBER NEWS (Cont.)

### FIND LOST MONEY!



You may have  
money just waiting  
for you to claim it!

No, we didn't get Tier II money but still, you may have money coming your way! How? Why? How much???

Every year, unclaimed property, including money, is turned over to each state in the U.S. This money may be from insurance policies no one ever claimed, inactive bank accounts, security deposits from utility companies, tax refunds or even payroll. There is a law that lost assets have to be turned over to the states. Every year the newspaper publishes a long list of names of people that have unclaimed assets.

But why wait for the newspaper's annual list? Just recently, I was researching an old insurance policy I found in my father's papers. (More on finding lost insurance policies in a future issue). I came across several web sites to locate lost property. Some of these wanted to charge you for searching for anything. There are also some fraudulent companies out there that claim you have money coming to you for a price. There are some free websites, however, including state treasury websites, that will search for free.

The web site I liked was a free national web site, [www.Missingmoney.com](http://www.Missingmoney.com) operated by the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators (NAUPA). NAUPA will look in the treasury departments for unclaimed property in 18 states. At this time, Michigan is not in their national directory. There are also links to search the other states that aren't in the national directory, such as Michigan. Anyway, I tried my name and came up negative. No pot of gold waiting for me out there. Then, I put in my sister's last name...

Low and behold, my niece, Jennifer, with her correct address, came up in the unclaimed property in Florida. The site indicated the amount was less than \$100 and was related to payroll from a restaurant she worked at several years ago. I called her and of course she was surprised. She remembered she never picked up her last paycheck from the restaurant. Her employer just turned it over to the state of Florida as unclaimed property. Now, all she has to do is file a claim, show proof of her identity and she will get her money. What fun! It is like finding buried treasure!

As for Michigan, you can go directly to the Michigan treasury department for the State of Michigan (<http://www.michigan.gov/treasury/>), then go to Michigan Money Quest link and just type in your name or the name of anyone you want to search. Whoopee!

You can also do a Google search using the term, "unclaimed property State of Nevada", or any other state you think there might be unclaimed property of someone you know. Try it. You never know what is out there waiting for you. One note of caution! Try doing the search yourself before ever considering paying for this service. Also, never be duped in believing there is a fortune out there for you if a company contacts you directly.

One of the Detroit VARO raters searched the websites for unclaimed property using her mother's maiden name and her grand-mother's name came up. She had died in 1949 and left a life insurance policy that was never claimed by the children at the time. The rater's aunt, who is now 92 years old, is now submitting a claim for the proceeds of the life insurance policy from Metropolitan Life. She might get that new roof she needs. Good Luck in your search!

Sue Drag, RVSR



## PENNY'S PET PAGE



As we enter into the holiday gift-giving season, many people consider giving a pet to someone as a present. Please think twice about this idea and decide if you should really go ahead with it.

First of all, deciding to get a pet is a major decision. There is a lot of responsibility and hard work involved with making a home a happy and healthy place for a pet. It's best if everyone in the family can sit down together and discuss the different aspects of getting a pet. They should decide ahead of time on who will help in the new responsibilities of caring for the dog, cat, hamster, bird or other pet.

Each household needs to assess which pet would be the right type to fit in with their lifestyle, schedules and living arrangements. For some a puppy is too boisterous, for others a kitten won't work because of a family member's allergies. Maybe there is already a dog or cat in the family and certain precautions need to be made before bringing in a bird or hamster or bunny.

Lastly, selecting a pet is as much of an emotional decision as it is a financial one. The pet owner wants to feel a special connection between himself and his pet. Sometimes it's best if he gets to be the one to personally pick out the pet.

Unfortunately, too many animals who were surprise presents end up in animal shelters just a few months later because the recipient of the "gift" was not involved in the decision. There's nothing sadder than seeing a dog or cat in an animal shelter because they outgrew the cute puppy/kitten stage. Some owners realize too late that they were just not prepared for the responsibility; or the pet did not match their personality or lifestyle. When you were a child, how did you feel when Mom or Dad told you they were taking Spot (who had been leaving a few "spots" on the carpet) to "live with a friend who had a farm."

If you're still thinking about giving a "live" present...really put some thought into choosing the right pet. Deciding to get a puppy or kitten is a big decision and there are many things you might want to consider. It's always good to remember that puppies and kittens grow up – often into much bigger adult versions. Big dogs sometimes need lots of exercise and some cats can be annoying if they're not neutered. If you're not sure how big the breed that you are considering will get, you should ask a veterinarian or other knowledgeable person. It's also smart to have the vet check out the pet to make sure it is healthy and caught up on its shots. If you reside in a big house with a big fenced in yard, then you can choose whatever breed you want. But if you live in an apartment in the city, you may want to choose a smaller, quieter animal and check the lease to see if animals are even allowed.

Before you decide to bring an animal home make sure you know what it will cost over time, and that the recipient can handle it financially. There are trips to the vet, immunizations, food, etc., that should be tallied into your figure, not to mention the expense of replacing household items that get ruined from kittens scratching, puppies chewing, and the inevitable "accidents" before you can train them to know better.

If you still think you're ready, don't forget to consider the local animal shelter. There are lots of good dogs and cats "on the farm" there who need homes and deserve a second chance to have someone special love them and take care of them. Carefully considering the above advice will help you to know whether a pet is the right present to give this holiday and will determine if your Christmas surprise will be a Hollywood movie dream or a National Lampoon's holiday disaster.

Revised from 2004 First Draft's adaptation from the *Big Book of Hints from Heloise*, by Heloise





## HR INFORMATION

### TSP Open Season



Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) Open Season runs through Dec. 31st of this year. The changes you make are effective the first full pay period after you submit your change to Employee Express. During Open

Season, Federal employees may enroll in the program, increase their contribution and/or change the allocation of their investment. It's a good time to take advantage of the increased amounts you're allowed to contribute this year. FERS employees - 15% of your basic pay each pay period and CSRS employees - 10% of your basic pay each pay period up to the IRS annual limit of \$14,000 for 2005. Use Employee Express to increase contributions; investment changes can be made on TSP's web site or call the ThriftLine on 1-877-968-3778. For more information, visit the TSP website, [www.tsp.gov](http://www.tsp.gov)

### Give the Gift of Leave

If you have over and above the 240 hour maximum allowed to carry over into the New Year and are not scheduled to use the leave yourself, please consider donating the extra hours to employees in need under the Voluntary Leave Transfer Program. We have employees here and across the country in need of donated leave. The minimum annual leave donation is four hours and the maximum is the number of hours that could be used from the time you donate until the end of the leave year. Even if you are not in a "use or lose" situation, you may want to help others by donating leave. Your gift of leave over the holidays will be very much appreciated by your fellow employees who are in a non-pay status. Thank you.



## DECEMBER THANK YOU



Richard McKee sent an email to VA Secretary Anthony J. Principi which read as follows:

Dear Mr. Principi:

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the outstanding effort by the following Dept. of Veterans Affairs employees located at the Detroit Regional Office in getting me trained and setup to use the One VPN and Virtual VA computer programs. This will help make my work with Veteran claimants much more efficient in the future.

Rebecca Buikema  
Daniele Poleni  
William Larson  
Hugh Hill  
Tom VanTol

Sincerely  
Richard S. McKee, VSO  
Fleet Reserve Association

Secretary Principi replied with:



"Thank you for your kind email. I'm pleased to learn that our folks in Detroit were helpful to you and will be sure to commend them."

In addition, Admiral Cooper sent a letter to the Detroit Regional Office to acknowledge the service provided by the above employees. The Director, Keith Thompson, approved an award of recognition to the group for their efforts on behalf of Mr. McKee and for bringing such positive attention to the VA Detroit Regional Office. Well Done All!

## DECEMBER RECIPES

*These recipes are great for holiday parties and get-togethers with family and friends!*

### **Tasty Crockpot Chicken Barbecue**

#### **Ingredients:**

2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts  
1 1/2 cups tomato ketchup  
3 tablespoons brown sugar  
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce  
1 tablespoon soy sauce  
1 tablespoon cider vinegar  
1 teaspoon ground red hot pepper flakes, or to taste  
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder

#### **Preparation:**

Combine all ingredients for the sauce in the slow cooker. Add the chicken, try to coat it well with the sauce. Cook on high 3-4 hours, or until chicken is fully cooked all the way through. Then shred or cut up the chicken, and replace it in the Barbecue sauce in the pot; Mix it up so all the pieces are coated. You can keep the slow cooker on low to keep the chicken warm for serving on hard rolls.



### **Rosemary Potatoes**

#### **Ingredients:**

2 pounds of new red potatoes, quartered  
1 teaspoon of dried rosemary  
1 teaspoon of olive oil  
1/8 teaspoon of salt  
1/8 teaspoon of sugar

#### **Preparation:**

Mix all ingredients together. Stir to coat potatoes with oil. Spread on a non-stick baking sheet. Bake at 375 degrees for 50 minutes.

Source: *First Draft* December issue, from  
*Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine*



### **Cookie Mix in Jar**

*A perfect holiday gift to give!!*

Use chocolate chips or other baking chips or small candies.

#### **Ingredients:**

1 cup light brown sugar  
1/2 cup granulated sugar  
1 1/2 cup semisweet chocolate chips  
2 cup all purpose flour  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon baking soda

#### **Preparation:**

Mix salt and baking soda with flour. Then layer ingredients in jar in any order. Cover lid with a fabric circle and tie with a ribbon, if desired. To the ribbon attach a card with the following recipe and instructions:

### **Chocolate Chip Cookies**

Cookie mix in a jar

1 cup butter

1 egg

1 teaspoon vanilla

Beat butter in a medium bowl until fluffy. Beat in egg and vanilla. With a wooden spoon, Stir cookie mix into creamed mixture until well blended. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto greased baking sheets. Bake in preheated 350° oven for 8 minutes or until lightly browned. Makes about 4 dozen chocolate chip cookies.

Julie Tucker



## A CHRISTMAS STORY

### Santa Is Alive And Well...

I remember my first Christmas adventure with Grandma. I was just a kid. I remember tearing across town on my bike to visit her on the day my big sister dropped the bomb: "There is no Santa Claus," she jeered. "Even dummies know that!"

My Grandma was not the gushy kind, never had been. I fled to her that day because I knew she would be straight with me. I knew Grandma always told the truth, and I knew that the truth always went down a whole lot easier when swallowed with one of her "world-famous" cinnamon buns. I knew they were world-famous because Grandma said so. It had to be true. Grandma was home, and the buns were still warm. Between bites, I told her everything. She was ready for me. "No Santa Claus?" she snorted.... "Ridiculous! Don't believe it. That rumor has been going around for years, and it makes me mad, plain mad!! Now, put on your coat, and let's go."

"Go? Go where, Grandma?" I asked. I hadn't even finished my second world-famous cinnamon bun. 'Where' turned out to be **Kerby's** General Store, the one store in town that had a little bit of just about everything. As we walked through it's doors, Grandma handed me ten dollars. That was a bundle in those days. "Take this money," she said, "and buy something for someone who needs it. I'll wait for you in the car." Then she turned and walked out of **Kerby's**.

I was only nine years old! I'd often gone shopping with my mother, but never had I shopped for anything all by myself. The store seemed big and crowded, full of people scrambling to finish their Christmas shopping. For a few moments I just stood there, confused, clutching that ten dollar bill, wondering what to buy, and who on earth to buy it for. I thought of everybody I knew: my family, my friends, my neighbors, the kids at school, and the people who went to my church. I was just about thought out, when I suddenly thought of Bobby Decker. He was a kid with bad breath and messy hair, and he sat right behind me in Mrs. Pollock's grade-4 class. Bobby Decker didn't have a coat so he never went out to recess during the winter.

His mother always wrote a note, telling the teacher that he had a cough, but all us kids knew that Bobby didn't have a cough; he just had no coat.

With growing excitement, I fingered the ten-dollar bill. I would buy Bobby Decker a coat! I settled on a red corduroy one that had a hood to it. It looked real warm, and he would like that. "Is this a Christmas present for someone?" the lady behind the counter asked kindly, as I laid my ten dollars down. "Yes, ma'am," I replied shyly. "It's for Bobby." The nice lady smiled as I told her about how Bobby really needed a warm winter coat. I didn't get any change, but she put the coat in a bag, smiled again, and wished me a Merry Christmas.

That evening, Grandma helped me wrap the coat in Christmas paper. A little tag fell out of the coat, but Grandma said it was okay and just tucked it in her Bible. We finished wrapping the coat and tied the package with pretty ribbon, then wrote, "To Bobby, From Santa Claus" on it. Grandma said that Santa always insisted on secrecy.

Then she drove me to Bobby Decker's house, explaining as we went that I was now and forever officially one of Santa's helpers. Grandma parked down the street from Bobby's house, and she and I crept noiselessly and hid in the bushes by his front walk. Then Grandma gave me a nudge. "All right, Santa Claus," she whispered, "Get going." I took a deep breath, dashed for his front door, threw the present down on his step, pounded his doorbell and flew back to the safety of the bushes and Grandma. Together we waited breathlessly in the darkness for the front door to open. Finally it did, and there stood Bobby. He was overwhelmed.

Fifty years haven't dimmed the thrill of those moments spent shivering, beside my Grandma, in Bobby Decker's bushes. That night, I realized that those awful rumors about Santa Claus were just what Grandma said they were: Ridiculous! Santa was alive and well, and we were on his team. Grandma has long since passed on, but I still have the Bible, with the coat tag tucked inside. It says, "\$19.95."





## PICTURE PAGE



Pam Carr receives recognition for years of service.



Engineer Ed Gromek on the Owosso Express!

## Greetings to the Detroit VA Regional Office

